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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: June 4, 2002

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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Memphis, TN- Terrell L. Harris, United States Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee announced that yesterday James L. Watkins, a Lake County, Tennessee resident, pleaded guilty to a one count information charging him with obstruction of justice. Title 18, United States Code, § 1512(b)(1), makes it a crime to corruptly persuade, or attempt to corruptly persuade, another person with the intent to influence, delay or prevent their testimony before an official proceeding. Violations of § 1512(b)(1) are punishable by a term of imprisonment of up to ten years and a fine of up to \$250,000.00.

The one count information charged that in July of 2001 Watkins attempted to "corruptly persuade Timothy Lowrance with the intent to influence, delay and prevent the testimony of [Lowrance] before a grand jury proceeding..." Watkins entered his plea before United States District Judge Bernice Donald in Memphis on June 3, 2002. Until recently, Watkins was the General Sessions Judge in Lake County, Tennessee.

On May 2, 2002, Lowrance pleaded guilty to a one count information charging him with conspiracy to commit mail fraud in U.S. District Court in Memphis, Tennessee. The information

in that case charged that Lowrance had conspired with others to defraud the State of Tennessee of its intangible right to Lowrance's honest services.

According to the information in the Lowrance case, Lowrance operated the West Tennessee Handgun Permit School, a school authorized to teach a statutorily required handgun safety course. State law requires that an individual applying for a state issued handgun carry permit is required to take and pass the safety course in order to obtain a permit. The information charged that the members of the conspiracy provided certificates signed by Lowrance, which indicated that an applicant had passed the safety course, to individuals who had not taken and passed the course. The conspiracy operated from December of 2000 to June of 2001.

The Watkins case was investigated by Investigators Jack Cunningham and Bill Yates of the Tennessee Highway Patrol's Criminal Investigation Division, Special Agent Brent Booth of the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and Special Agent John Lewoczko of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Jackson, Tennessee office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Joe Murphy of the United States Attorney's Memphis, Tennessee office.

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